

REMINISCENCES OF LEONID ANDREYEV

This translation, which is authorised by Maxim Gorki, was made by Katherine Mansfield and S. S. Koteliansky during the last stay of the former in England, August-September, 1922.

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No.

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REMINISCENCES OF LEONID ANDRIYEV
AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
KATHERINE HANFIELD
AND
S. S. KOTLIANSKY.

The reproduction on the opposite page is a facsimile of the handwriting of Katherine Mansfield, the words being re-arranged to avoid the necessity of reduction.

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Reminiscences of
Leonid Andreyev

by
MAXIM GORKI.

Translated

by
S. S. Kotelovsky

and

Katherine Mansfield

REMINISCENCES
OF LEONID ANDREYEV

IN the spring of 1898 I read in the *Moscow Courier* a story called "Berg-amot and Garaska"—an Easter story of the usual type. Written to appeal to the heart of the holiday reader, it reminded him once again that man is still capable, at certain moments and in certain special circumstances, of a feeling of generosity, and that at times enemies become friends, if only for a short while, if only for a day.

Since Gogol's "Overcoat" Russian writers have probably written several hundreds or even thousands of such deliberately pathetic stories; they are, as it were, the dandelions, which, scattered

among the superb flowers of genuine Russian literature, are meant to brighten the beggarly life of the sick and rigid Russian soul.*

But from that story there was borne to me the strong breeze of a talent which reminded me in a way of Pomyalovsky; again in the tone of the story one felt a roguish little smile of distrust of facts which the author concealed; that little smile easily reconciled one to the inevitable, forced sentimentalism of Easter and Christmas literature.

I wrote the author a few lines about his story, and I received from L. Andreyev an amusing answer; he wrote merry, unusual phrases in a singular handwriting, with half-printed letters, and amongst them stood out in particular relief a dis-

* It is quite likely that at that time my thoughts were different from those I describe now, but it is not of interest to recall my old thoughts.

ingenuous but sceptical aphorism:

"To a well-fed man to be generous is as pleasant as to have coffee after dinner."

So began my acquaintance with Leonid Nicolaievitch Andreyev. In the summer I read some more of his short stories and light articles under his journalistic pseudonym of James Lynch, and noticed how quickly and boldly the individual talent of the new writer was developing.

In the autumn, on my way to the Crimea, at the Kursk railway station in Moscow, someone introduced us to each other. Dressed in an oldish overcoat, in a shaggy sheep-skin hat tilted to one side, he looked like a young actor in an Ukrainian theatrical company. His handsome face struck me as not very mobile, but in the fixed glance of his dark eyes gleamed the smile which so pleasantly irradiated his stories and light articles. I don't remember his words, but they were un-

usual, and unusual also was the construction of his agitated speech. He spoke hurriedly, with a dullish, booming voice, with a little crisp cough, his words slightly choking him, while he waved his hands monotonously as though he were conducting. He appeared to me a healthy, sprite-like, cheery man, capable of supporting with a laugh the woes of this world. His excitement was pleasant.

“Let us be friends!” he said, pressing my hand.

I, too, was joyfully excited.

§

In the winter, on my way from the Crimea to Nijni, I stopped in Moscow, and there our relations rapidly assumed the character of a close friendship.

Seeing how little in touch he was with

reality, how little interested in it, indeed, —I was the more surprised by the power of his intuition, by the fertility of his imagination, by the grip of his fantasy. A single phrase, at times a single pointed word was enough to start him off, and seizing the insignificant thing given him he would instantly develop it into a scene, anecdote, character, story.

"Who is S?" he asked about a certain author fairly popular at that time.

"A tiger out of a furrier's shop," I replied.

He laughs, and lowering his voice, as though communicating a secret, says hurriedly:

"You know, I must describe a man who has convinced himself that he is a hero, a tremendous destroyer of all that exists, and has become frightful to himself even—yes! Everybody believes him—so well has he deceived himself. But

somewhere in his own corner—in real life—he is a mere miserable nonentity, is afraid of his wife or even of his cat.”

So winding one word after another round the core of his flexible thought, he was always creating something unexpected and singular, easily and gaily.

The palm of one of his hands had been pierced by a bullet, his fingers were crooked; I asked him how it happened.

“An *équivoque* of youthful romanticism,” he replied. “You see, a man who has not tried to kill himself, is very small beer.”

Thereupon he sat down on the divan close to me, and in superb fashion related how once, when a youth, he had thrown himself under a goods train, but fortunately fell between the rails, and the train rushed over him and merely stunned him.

There was something vague, unreal in the story, but he embellished it with an

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astonishingly vivid description of the sensations of a man over whom hundreds of ton loads are moving with an iron rumble. These sensations were familiar to me, too: as a lad of about ten I used to lie down under a ballast train, competing in audacity with my chums, one of whom, the pointsman's son, played the game with particular cool-headedness. It is an almost safe amusement, provided the furnace of the locomotive is raised high enough and the train is moving up hill, not down hill, for then the brake-chains of the cars are tightly stretched, and can't strike you or, having caught you, fling you on to the sleepers. For a few seconds you experience an eerie sensation, you try to press as flat and close to the ground as possible, and with the exertion of your whole will to overcome the passionate desire to stir, to raise your head. You feel that the stream of

iron and timber, rushing over you, tears you off the ground and wants to drag you off somewhere, and the rumble and grinding of the iron rings as it were in your bones. Then, when the train has passed, you still lie motionless for a minute or more, powerless to rise, seeming to swim along after the train; and it is as if your body stretches out endlessly, grows, becomes light, melts into air, and—the next moment you will be flying above the earth. It is very pleasant to feel all this.

“What fascinated you in such an absurd game?” asked Andreyev.

I said that perhaps we were testing the power of our wills, by opposing to the mechanical motion of huge masses the conscious immobility of our puny little bodies.

“No,” he replied, “that is too good; no child could think that.”

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Reminding him of how children love to "tread the cradle"—to gambol on the supple ice of a new frozen pond or of a shallow river-edge, I said that they generally liked dangerous games.

"No, it can't be that, somehow. Nearly all children are afraid of the dark. . . .
The poet said:

'There is delight in battle,
And on the edge of a dark abyss;'

but that is merely 'fine words,' nothing more. I have a different idea, but I can't quite get at it."

And suddenly he started up, as though touched by an inner fire.

"I must write a story about a man who all his life long, suffering madly, sought the truth. And, behold, truth appeared to him, but he shut his eyes, stopped his ears and said: 'I do not want thee, however fair thou mayst be, for my

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life, my torments have kindled in my soul a hatred of thee.' What do you think?" I did not like the theme. He said, with a sigh:

"Yes, one must first answer wherein lies the truth—in man or outside him? According to you—it is in man?"

And he burst out into laughter:

"Then it is very bad, a very paltry affair."

§

There was scarcely a single fact, scarcely a single problem which Leonid Andreyev and I looked at in the same way, but innumerable differences did not prevent us—for years—from regarding each other with an intensity of interest and of consideration which is seldom the result of even a long-standing friendship.

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We were indefatigable in our discussions, I remember we once sat uninterruptedly for over twenty hours and drank several samovars of tea—Leonid swallowed an incredible quantity of tea.

He was a wonderfully interesting talker, inexhaustible, witty. Although his mind always manifested a stubborn tendency to peer into the darkest corners of the soul—nevertheless, his thought was so alert, so capriciously individual that it readily took grotesque and humorous forms. In a conversation among friends he could use his sense of humour flexibly and beautifully, but in his stories he unfortunately lost that capacity, so rare in a Russian.

Although he possessed a lively and sensitive imagination, he was lazy; he was much fonder of talking about literature than of creating it. The delight of martyr-like toil at night in stillness and

solitude seated before a white, clean sheet of paper, was almost impossible to him, he valued but little the joy of covering that sheet with the pattern of words.

“I write with difficulty. Writing is a strain on me,” he would confess. “The nibs seem to me inconvenient, the process of writing—too slow and even degrading. My thoughts flutter about like jackdaws in a fire, I soon tire of catching them and arranging them in proper order. Often this is what happens: I have written a word—and suddenly I get caught in a cobweb—for no reason, I begin to think of geometry, algebra, and the teacher at my old school at Oriol—a very stupid man, indeed. He often quoted the words of some philosopher: ‘True wisdom is calm.’ But I know that the best men on earth suffer torments of agitation. Curse calm wisdom! But what is there instead of it? Beauty? Vivat? However, al-

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though I have not seen Venus in the original, she seems to me from her photographs a rather silly female. As a rule, pretty things are always rather stupid. Take, for instance, a peacock, a greyhound, a woman. . . .”

§

Indifferent to facts of actuality, sceptical in his attitude to the mind and will of man—it would seem that the idea of laying down the law, of playing the teacher ought not have to attract him. That is a rôle inevitable for one who is familiar — much too familiar — with reality. But our very first conversation clearly indicated that, whilst possessing all the qualities of a superb artist, he wished to assume the pose of a thinker and of a philosopher as well. This seemed

to me dangerous, almost hopeless, chiefly because his stock of knowledge was strangely poor. And one always felt as though he sensed the nearness of an invisible enemy, that he was arguing intensely with someone and wanted to subdue him.

Leonid was not fond of reading, and himself the maker of books—the creator of miracles—he looked upon old books distrustfully and heedlessly.

“A book to you is like a fetich to a savage,” he would say. “That is because you have not rubbed holes in your breeches on the benches of a public school, because you have not come into contact with University learning. But to me the *Iliad*, Pushkin, and all the rest are beslavered by teachers, prostituted by constipated officials. *Sorrow through Knowledge* [a play by Griboyedov] is as boring to me as Hall and Knight’s

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arithmetic. I am as sick of *The Captain's Daughter* as I am of the little lady from the Tverskoy Boulevard."

I had heard these familiar words about the influence of the public school on one's attitude to literature too often, and they had long since sounded to me unconvincing, for one felt in them the prejudice begotten by Russian laziness. Much more original was Andreyev when describing how the reviews and critical articles in the papers mutilate and maim books, treating them in the style of reports of street accidents.

"They are mills, they grind Shakespeare, the Bible—anything you like—into the dust of banality. I once read in a paper a critical article on Don Quixote, and I suddenly saw with horror that Don Quixote was an old man of my acquaintance, a director of the Court of Exchequer; he had a chronic cold in the

nose and a mistress, a girl from a confectionery shop, whom he called by the grand name of Millie, but in actual life—on the boulevards—she was known as Sonka Bladder. . . .”

But although he regarded knowledge and books lightly, heedlessly, and at times with hostility, he was always keenly interested in what I was reading. On one occasion seeing in my room at the “Moscow Hotel” Alexey Ostroumov’s book on Synesius, the Bishop of Ptolemais, he asked wonderingly:

“What do you want this for?”

I told him about the queer half-pagan Bishop and read a few lines from his work *In Praise of Baldness*. “What [asks Synesius] can be more bald yet what is more divine than the sphere?”

This pathetic exclamation of the descendant of Hercules drove Leonid into a fit of laughter, but immediately, wiping

the tears from his eyes and still laughing, he said:

“ You know, it is a superb subject for a story about an unbeliever who, wishing to test the stupidity of believers, assumes a mask of saintliness, lives the life of a martyr, preaches a new doctrine of God—a very stupid doctrine—and so attains the love and admiration of thousands. Then he says to his disciples and followers: ‘ All this is rubbish.’ But they need a faith, and so they kill him.”

I was struck by his words. The point was that Synesius had expressed the same idea:

“ If I were told that a Bishop must share the opinions of the people, I would reveal to all who I am. For what can there be in common between the rabble and philosophy? Divine truth must be hidden; the people need something quite different.”

But I had not told Andreyev of that idea, nor had I the opportunity of telling him about the unusual position of the unbaptized pagan philosopher in the rôle of Bishop of a Christian Church. When eventually I did so, he exclaimed triumphantly and laughing:

“There you see—one does not need to be always reading in order to know and to understand.”

§

Leonid was talented by nature, organically talented; his intuition was astonishingly keen. In all that touched on the dark side of life, the contradictions in the human soul, the rumblings in the domain of the instincts, he had eerie powers of divination. The instance of Bishop Synesius is not the only one; I

could quote a score of such cases.

Thus, talking with him about various seekers after an unshakable belief, I related to him the contents of the MS. *Confession*, by the priest Apollonov—a work by one of the unknown martyrs of thought which had called forth Leo Tolstoi's *Confession*. I told him what I had observed personally of men of dogmatic beliefs: they often appear voluntary prisoners of a blind, unyielding faith, and the more they actively defend its validity the more despairingly they doubt it.

Andreyev mused for a while, slowly stirring his glass of tea; then he said, smiling:

“It is strange to me that you understand this; you speak like an atheist, but you think as a believer. If you die before me I will inscribe on your grave-stone: ‘Crying to others to worship reason he

himself secretly jeered at its impotence.' ”

And in a couple of minutes leaning on my shoulder, glancing into my eyes with the dilated pupils of his dark eyes, he said in an undertone:

“ I shall write about a parson, you will see! This, my dear fellow, I shall do well!”

And threatening someone with his finger, vigorously rubbing his temples, he smiled:

“ To-morrow I am going home and shall begin it! I have even got the opening sentence: ‘ Among people he was lonely, for he had a glimpse of a great mystery.’ . . . ”

Next day he went away to Moscow, and in a week's time—not more—he wrote to me that he was working on the parson, and that his work was going smoothly “ as on snow-shoes.” Thus he always caught in flight anything that

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answered the needs of his spirit that was in contact with the most acute and tormenting mysteries of life.

§

The noisy success of his first book filled him to overflowing with youthful joy. He came to me at Nijni—happy, in a brand new tobacco-coloured suit; the front of his stiffly starched shirt was adorned with a rakishly bright tie, and on his feet he had yellow boots.

“I tried to find straw-coloured gloves, but a lady in the shop at Kuznetsky warned me that straw colour was no longer the fashion. I suspect that she told a fib. The truth was she valued the freedom of her heart too much to risk becoming convinced of my irresistible attractiveness in straw-coloured gloves.

But, between ourselves, I can tell you that all this magnificence is uncomfortable; a blouse is much better."

And suddenly, hugging my shoulders, he said:

"I want to write a hymn, you know. I don't yet see—to whom or to what; but a hymn it must be! Something Schillerian, eh? Something grand, sonorous—boom-m!"

I chaffed him about it.

"Well!" he exclaimed merrily. "Is not Ecclesiastes right when he says: 'Even a rotten life is better than a good death.' Although he puts it rather differently, something about a lion and a dog: 'For domestic purposes a bad dog is more useful than a nice lion.' Well, what do you think: could Job have read the Book of Ecclesiastes?"

Intoxicated with the wine of joy he dreamt of a journey on the Volga in a

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good boat, of walking to the Crimea.

"I'll drag you off, too. Otherwise you will build yourself in among these old bricks," he said, pointing to the books.

His happiness resembled the lively and comfortable state of a baby which has been hungry too long, and now thinks it has eaten enough to last for ever.

We sat on a wide divan, in a little room, drank red wine; Andreyev took down from the shelf a note-book of poems:

"May I?" he asked, and began reading aloud:

"Columns of coppery firs,

The monotonous sound of the sea.'

"It is the Crimea? Now, I can't write poems, and I have no desire to. I like ballads best. As a rule:

'I love all that is new,
Romantic, nonsensical,
Like the poet
Of olden times.'

“ I believe that is a song in the musical comedy *The Green Island*:

‘ And the trees are moaning
Like verses unrhymed.’

“ That I like. But—tell me—why do you write poems? It does not suit you at all. After all, whatever you may think, verse is an artificial business.”

Then we composed parodies of Skitalez:

I'll grasp a huge log
In my mighty hand,
And all of you—unto the seventh
generation—
I will knock down flat!
Moreover I will stupefy you—
Hurrah! Tr-r-remble! I am glad—
I'll dash Kasbeck on your heads,
I'll bring down Ararat upon you!

He laughed as he went on composing verse after verse of delightful, amusing parodies. But suddenly bending towards me, with a glass of wine in his hand, he

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began in a low voice and gravely:

"I read recently an amusing anecdote. In a certain English town there stands a memorial to Robert Burns, the poet. But there is no inscription on the memorial to inform you to whom it is erected. At the foot of it a boy was selling newspapers. A certain author came up to him and said: 'I'll buy a paper from you if you'll tell me whose statue this is.' 'Robert Burns,' the boy replied. 'Splendid!' said the author. 'Now I'll buy all your papers if you'll tell me why this memorial was erected to Robert Burns.' The boy replied: 'Because he is dead.' How do you like it?"

I did not like it much; I was always seriously perturbed by Leonid's sharp and sudden fluctuations of mood.

§

Fame to him was not merely "a bright patch on the bard's old rags"—he wanted a great deal of it, he wanted it greedily and he made no secret of his desires. He said:

"When I was only fourteen I said to myself, I shall be famous or life won't be worth living. I am not afraid of telling you that all that has been done before my time does not seem to me to be better than what I myself can do. If you take that for conceit, you are wrong. Yes! Don't you see that this must be the basic conviction of anyone who does not want to place himself in the impersonal ranks of the millions of others. Indeed, the conviction of one's uniqueness must—and can—serve as the source of creative power. First let us say to ourselves: We

are not like all the others, and already we are on the way to prove this to all the rest as well."

"In a word you are a baby which does not want to feed at its nurse's breast."

"Just so! I want the milk of my soul only. Man needs love and attention, or that people should fear him. This even peasants realise, when they put on the mask of a sorcerer. Happiest of all are those who are loved with fear, as Napoleon was."

"Have you read his *Memoirs*?"

"No. I don't need to."

He winked at me, smiling:

"I, too, keep a diary and I know how it is done. *Memoirs*, *Confessions* and such like are the excrements of the soul that is poisoned by bad food."

He loved such sayings, and when they were successful he was sincerely delighted. Despite his gravitation towards

pessimism, there was in him something ineradicably childish—for instance, his childishly naïve boasting about his verbal agility, of which he made much better use in conversation than on paper.

Once I told him about a woman who prided herself to such a degree on her “honest” life and took so much trouble to convince all and sundry of her inaccessibility that those who surrounded her gasped from weariness, and either rushed headlong away from this model of virtue, or hated her to the verge of frenzy.

Andreyev listened, smiled and suddenly said:

“I am an honest woman, I am. I have no need to clean my nails, eh?”

In these words, with almost perfect exactness he defined the character and even the habits of the creature of whom I was speaking—the woman was careless

in her person. I told him this. He was delighted, and with childish sincerity began to boast:

“My dear fellow, I am myself surprised at times to find how cleverly and pointedly I can in two or three words seize the very essence of a fact or of a character.”

And he delivered a long speech in praise of himself; but—sensible man that he was—he realised that this was a trifle ridiculous, and he ended his tirade with a touch of buffoonery.

“In time I shall develop my capacity as a genius to such an extent that I shall be able to define in a single word the meaning of the whole life of a man, of a nation, of an epoch. . . .”

Yet the critical attitude towards himself was not particularly strongly developed in him; and this at times greatly spoiled his work and his life.

§

In every one of us, to my thinking, live and struggle embryos of several personalities. These dispute between themselves until, in the struggle, there is developed the embryo which is the strongest and most capable of adapting itself to the various reactions to impressions which form the final spiritual character of a man, thus creating a more or less complete psychical individuality.

Strangely and to his own torment Leonid split into two: in one and the same week he could sing "Hosannah" to the world, and pronounce "Anathema" against it.

This was not an external contradiction between the bases of his character and the habits or demands of his profession; no, in both cases he felt equally sincerely.

And, the more loudly he proclaimed Hosannah, the more powerfully resounded the echo Anathema.

He said:

"I hate individuals who refuse to walk on the sunny side of the street for fear that their faces may be burnt or their jackets faded—I hate all those who for dogmatic motives hamper the free, capricious play of their inner ego."

Once he wrote a rather caustic article on the people of the shady side, and immediately after this—on the occasion of Emile Zola's death from gas fumes—engaged in a vigorous attack on the barbarous asceticism at that time fairly popular among the *intelligenza*. But talking to me about that attack he declared suddenly:

"And yet, you know, my opponent is more consistent than I am: a writer ought to live like a homeless tramp.

Maupassant's yacht is an absurdity!"

He was not joking. We had an argument. I maintained: the more varied the needs of man, the more eager he is for the joys of life, however paltry, the quicker develops the culture of the body and of the spirit. He retorted: No, Tolstoi is right, culture is rubbish, it only maims the free growth of the soul.

"‘Attachment to things,’" he would say, "is the fetichism of savages, idolatry. Don't make an idol for yourself, if you do you are rotten—that is the truth! Make a book to-day, and to-morrow make a machine. Yesterday you made a book, and you have already forgotten about it. We must learn to forget."

And I said: "It is necessary to remember that each thing is the embodiment of the human spirit, and often the inner value of a thing is more significant than man."

"That is worship of dead matter," he exclaimed.

"In it is embodied immortal thought."

"What is thought? Its impotence makes it double-faced and disgusting."

We argued more and more often, more and more intensely. The sharpest point of difference was our attitude to thought.

To me—thought is the source of all that exists, out of thought arose everything that is seen and felt by man; even in the consciousness of its impotence to solve the "accursed questions" thought is majestic and noble.

I feel that I live in the atmosphere of thought, and, seeing the great and grand things that have been created by it—I believe that its impotence is temporary. Perhaps I am romancing and exaggerate the creative power of thought; but this is so natural in Russia, in a country where there is no spiritual synthesis, in a coun-

try paganly sensual, monstrously cruel.

Leonid regarded thought as a "wicked trick played on man by the devil"; it seemed to him false and hostile. Luring man to the abysses of inexplicable mysteries it deceives him, it leaves him in painful and impotent loneliness in face of all that is mysterious, and itself vanishes.

Equally irreconcilably did we differ in our views on man, the source of thought, its furnace. To me man is always the conqueror, even when he is mortally wounded and dying. Splendid is his longing to know himself and to know nature; and although his life is a torment, he is ever widening its bounds, creating with his thoughts wise science, marvellous art. I felt that I did sincerely and actively love man—him who is at present alive and working side by side with me, and him, too, the sensible, the good, the

strong, who will follow after in the future. To Andreyev man appeared poor in spirit, a creature interwoven of irreconcilable contradictions of instinct and intellect, for ever deprived of the possibility of attaining inner harmony. All his works are "vanity of vanities," decay and self-deception. And above all he is the slave of death and all his life long he walks, dragging its chain.

§

It is very difficult to speak of a man whom you know and know profoundly.

That sounds like a paradox; but it is true: when the mysterious thrill that emanates from the flame of another's ego is felt by you, agitates you—you fear to touch with your oblique clumsy words the invisible rays of the soul that is dear

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to you; you fear lest you express things wrongly. You don't want to mutilate what you feel and what is almost indefinable in words; you dare not enclose in your constricted speech that which is the essence of another, even though it be universally valid, of human value.

It is much easier and simpler to speak of what you feel less vividly. In such cases you can add a great deal, indeed anything you like, for yourself.

I think that I comprehended Leonid Andreyev clearly: to be more exact, I saw that he was treading a path overhanging a precipice, a precipice that leads to the slough of madness, a precipice at the mere contemplation of which the sight of the mind is extinguished.

Great was the force of his imagination; but notwithstanding the continuous and strained attention which he gave to the humiliating mystery of death, he could

not imagine anything beyond it, nothing majestic or comforting—he was after all too much of a realist to invent comfort for himself, even though he wished it.

This preference of his for treading the path over the void was what above all kept us apart. I had passed through Leonid's mood long before—and through natural human pride, it became organically revolting and humiliating to me to reflect on death. The time had come when I said to myself: while that which feels and thinks in me is alive, death dare not touch that power.

I once told Leonid of how I had once to go through a hard time of "the prisoner's dream of life beyond the bounds of his prison," of "stony darkness," of "immobility for ever poised"; he jumped up from the divan and pacing the room, waving his maimed hand, he said hurriedly, indignantly, gasping for breath:

“It is cowardice, my dear fellow, to shut the book without reading it to the end! In the book is your indictment, in it you are denied, don’t you see? You are denied along with everything there is in you, with your humanism, socialism, æsthetics, love—isn’t all this nonsense according to the book? It is ridiculous and pitiable: you have been sentenced to death—for what? And you, pretending that you are not aware of the fact, play about with little flowers, deceiving yourself and others—silly little flowers!...”

I pointed out to him the futility of protesting against an earthquake; I argued that protests cannot in the least affect the tremors of the earth’s crust—all this merely angered him.

We talked in Petersburg, in the autumn, in an empty, depressing room on the fifth floor. The city was enveloped in a thick mist; in its grey mass the

ghostly, rainbow globes of the street lamps hung motionless like huge bubbles. Through the thin cotton-wool of the mist nonsensical sounds rose up from the well of the street. Wearisome above all else were the hooves of the horses drumming on the wooden blocks of the road.

Leonid went and stood by the window, with his back to me. I realised keenly that at that moment he hated me as a man who walked the earth more easily and more freely than he, because he had thrown from his shoulders a humiliating and useless burden.

Even before this I had felt in him sharp spurtings of anger against me, but I can't say that this offended me, although it did alarm me; I understood—in my own way certainly—the source of his anger, and how life was hard on this rarely gifted man, dear to me and—at that time—my intimate friend.

There, below, the fire brigade dashed along noisily. Leonid came up to me, threw himself on the divan and suggested:

“Shall we drive to see the fire?”

“In Petersburg a fire isn’t interesting.”

He agreed.

“True, but in the provinces, in Oriol say, when streets of wooden buildings are burning and the people dash about like moths—it is nice! And pigeons over the cloud of smoke—have you ever seen that?”

Hugging my shoulders he said, smiling:

“You see everything—the devil take you! ‘Stony emptiness’—that is very good. Stony darkness and emptiness! You do understand the mood of the captive. . . .”

And butting my side with his head:

"At times I hate you for this as I do a beloved woman who is cleverer than myself."

I said I felt this, and that only a minute before he had hated me.

"Yes," he agreed, nestling his head on my knees. "Do you know why? I wish you were aching with my pain, then we should be nearer to one another—you really do know how lonely I am!"

Yes, he was very lonely, but at times it appeared to me that he jealously guarded his loneliness, it was dear to him as the source of his fantastic inspirations and the fertile soil of his originality.

"You lie when you say that scientific thought satisfies you," he said sternly, looking darkly at the ceiling with scared eyes. "Science, my dear fellow, is only mysticism dealing with facts: nobody knows anything—that's the truth. And the problem: how I think and why I

think, is the source of man's greatest torment—this is the most terrible truth! Come, let's go off somewhere, please...."

Whenever he touched on the problem of the mechanism of thinking, he became most agitated. And frightened.

We put on our coats, descended into the mist, and for a couple of hours swam in it on the Nevsky like eels at the bottom of a slimy river. Then we sat in a café and three girls pressed themselves on us, one of them a graceful Esthonian who called herself Elfrida. Her face was stony; she looked at Andreyev out of large, grey, lustreless eyes, with eerie gravity, while she drank a greenish venomous liqueur out of a coffee cup. It smelt of burnt leather.

Leonid drank cognac, rapidly got tipsy, became riotously witty, made the girls laugh by his surprisingly amusing and ingenious jokes, and at last decided to

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drive to the girls' flat—they were very insistent on this. To leave Leonid was impossible; whenever he began drinking something uncanny awoke in him, a revengeful need of destruction, the fury of "the captured beast."

I went with him. We bought wine, fruit, sweets, and somewhere in the Razyezhaya Street, in the corner of a dirty courtyard, blocked up with casks and timber, on the second floor of a wooden outbuilding, in two tiny rooms, the walls wretchedly and pathetically adorned with picture postcards—we began to drink.

Before he got to the state in which he would lose consciousness Leonid always became dangerously and wonderfully excited, his brain boiled up riotously, his imagination flared, his speech became almost intolerably brilliant.

One of the girls, plump, soft and agile

as a mouse, told us, almost with rapture, how the Assistant Crown Prosecutor had bitten her leg above the knee; she evidently considered the lawyer's action the most significant event of her life. She showed the scar left by the bite and, choking with agitation, her little glassy eyes shining with joy, said:

"He was awfully gone on me, it's quite frightening to remember it! He bit, you know, and he has a false tooth—and it stuck in my skin!"

This girl quickly got drunk, tumbled down in a corner of the couch, and fell asleep, snoring. The full-bodied, thick-haired, chestnut coloured girl, with sheepish eyes and monstrously long arms, played the guitar, and Elfrida deliberately undressed until she was stark naked, moved the bottles and plates on to the floor, jumped on the table and danced silently, wriggling like a serpent

without taking her eyes from Leonid. Then she began to sing in an unpleasantly thick voice, with angrily dilated eyes, and now and then as though broken in half, she bent over Andreyev. He kissed her knees, repeating the words he had caught up of the strange foreign song, while he nudged me with his elbow and said:

“She understands something, look at her, do you see? She understands!”

At moments Leonid's excited eyes seemed to go blind; growing still darker they sank deeper, as if in an attempt to peer inside his brain.

Grown tired the Esthonian jumped from the table to the bed, stretched herself, her mouth open, stroking with her palms her little breasts, sharp as a she-goat's.

Leonid said:

“The highest and deepest sensation in

life accessible to us is the spasm of the sexual act—yes, yes! Perhaps the earth, just like this b—— here, is rushing about in the desert of the universe expecting me to impregnate her with the realisation of the purpose of life, and I myself, with all that is marvellous in me—am only a spermatazoön.”

I suggested to him that we should go home.

“Go, I will stay here. . . .”

I could not leave him—he was already very drunk, and he had a good deal of money on him. He sat down on the bed, stroking the girl’s finely shaped legs, and began in an amusing way to tell her he loved her. She never let her eyes leave his face, her head resting on her hands.

“The baron has only to eat horse-radish to grow wings,” Leonid said.

“No, it isn’t true,” the girl said gravely.

"I told you she understands something!" exclaimed Leonid in drunken joy. In a few minutes he came out of the room. I gave the girl money and asked her to persuade Leonid to go for a drive. She instantly agreed, jumped up and began quickly to dress.

"I am afraid of him," she murmured. "Men like him pull out revolvers."

The girl who played the guitar fell asleep, sitting on the floor near the couch where her friend slept and snored.

The Esthonian was dressed by the time Leonid returned. He began making a row and shouted:

"I don't want to go! Let there be a feast of the flesh!"

And he attempted to undress the girl again; but struggling with him, she gazed so stubbornly into his eyes that her look tamed Leonid, and he agreed:

"Let us go!"

But he wanted to put on the lady's hat *à la Rembrandt* and had already plucked out the feathers.

"You'll pay for the hat?" the girl asked in a businesslike fashion.

Leonid raised his brows and burst into laughter.

"The hat settles it! Hooray!"

In the street we took a cab and drove through the mist. It was still not late, about midnight. The Nevsky with its huge beads of lamps, looked like a road going down hill into a hollow; round the lamps flitted wet particles of dust, in the grey dampness black fishes swam, standing on their tails, the hemispheres of the umbrellas seemed to draw people up—all was very ghostly, strange and sad.

In the open air Andreyev became completely drunk. He fell into a doze, swaying from side to side. The girl whispered to me:

"I'll get out. Shall I?"

And jumping from my knees into the liquid mud of the street she disappeared.

At the end of the Kamennoostrovsky Prospect Leonid asked, opening his eyes with a start:

"Are we driving? I want to go to a pub. You sent her away?"

"She went away."

"You are lying! You are cunning, so am I. I left the room in order to see what you would do. I stood behind the door and heard you urging her to make me go for a drive. You behaved innocently and nobly. When it comes to the point, you are a bad man. You drink a lot but don't get drunk, and because of this your children will be dipsomaniacs. My father also drank a great deal and did not get drunk, and I am an alcoholic."

Then we sat and smoked in the "Strelka," under the stupid bubble of the

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mist, and when the light of our cigarettes flared up we could see our overcoats covered with dim glass beads of dampness turning to grey.

Leonid spoke with boundless frankness, and it was not the frankness of a drunken man. His mind was scarcely affected until the moment when the poison of the alcohol completely stopped the working of his brain.

“ You have done and are doing a great deal for me—even to-day, I quite understand. If I had remained with the girls it would have ended badly for someone. Just so. But it is just because of this that I don’t love you, precisely because of this. You prevent me from being myself. Leave me! I want to expand. Perhaps you are the hoop on the cask; you will go away and the cask will fall to pieces; but let it fall to pieces—do you understand? Nothing should be restrained; let every-

thing be destroyed. Perhaps the true meaning of life consists indeed in the destruction of something which we don't know, of everything that has been thought out and made by us."

His dark eyes were fixed sternly on the grey mass around and above him; now and then he turned them towards the wet, leaf-strewn ground, and he stamped his feet as though testing the firmness of the earth.

"I don't know what you think, but what you always say is not the expression of your faith, of your prayer. You say that all the forces of life spring from the violation of equilibrium. But you yourself are indeed seeking for an equilibrium, for some kind of harmony, and are urging me to seek for the same thing; whereas—on your own showing—equilibrium is death!"

I said I was not urging him to any-

thing, I had no wish to urge him, but his life was dear to me, his health was dear, his work.

“It is only my work that pleases you—my external self, but not I myself, not that which I cannot incarnate in work. You stand in my way and in everybody’s way. Into the mud with you!”

He leant on my shoulder and, peering into my face with a smile, he went on:

“You think I am drunk and don’t realise that I am talking nonsense? I simply want to make you angry. You are a rare friend, I know, and you are stupidly disinterested, and I am a farceur begging for attention, like a beggar who shows his sores.”

This he said not for the first time, and I recognised a grain of truth in it. Or rather, a cleverly contrived explanation of certain peculiarities of his character.

“I, my dear fellow, am a decadent, a

degenerate, a sick man. But Dostoevsky was also a sick man, as are all great men. There's a book, I don't remember by whom, about genius and insanity, it proves that genius is a psychical disease! That little book has spoiled me. If I had not read it I should be a simpler man. And now, I know that I am almost a genius, but I am not sure whether I am sufficiently insane? Do you understand? I pretend to myself to be insane in order to convince myself of my talent—do you see?"

I burst out laughing. This seemed to me a poor invention, and therefore untrue.

When I said so, he also burst out laughing, and suddenly, with a flexible movement of his soul, with the agility of an acrobat, he leapt into the tone of a humorist:

"Ah! Where is a pub, the temple of

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literary worship? Talented Russians must necessarily converse in pubs. That is the tradition, and without it the critics won't admit talent."

We sat in a night-tavern for cabmen in damp, smoky stuffiness. The "waiters" raced about the dirty room angrily and wearily, drunken men swore "astronomically," terrible prostitutes screamed, and one of them bared her left breast—huge and yellow—put it on a plate, presented it to us, saying:

"Won't you buy a pound?"
"I love shamelessness," said Leonid.

"In cynicism I feel the sadness, almost the despair of man who realises that he can't—do you understand?—that he can't help being a beast. He wants not to be one, but he can't! Do you understand?"

He drank strong, almost black tea. I knew that he liked it so, and that it

sobered him and I purposely ordered it strong. Sipping the tarry bitter liquid, his eyes probing the puffy faces of the drunkards, Leonid spoke uninterruptedly:

“With women I am cynical. It’s the more truthful way—and they love it. It’s better to be a consummate sinner than a righteous man who can’t puff himself up into a state of complete saintliness.”

He glanced round, was silent for a while and said:

“Here it is as boring as an Ecclesiastical Council!”

This made him laugh.

“I’ve never been at an Ecclesiastical Council, it must be something like a fish-pond . . .”

The tea sobered him. We left the tavern. The mist thickened, the opalescent globes of the street lamps melted like ice.

"I should like some fish," said Leonid, as he leant his elbows on the parapet of the bridge across the Neva, and continued with animation: "You know my way? Probably children think like that. A child will pitch on a word and begin to pick out words that rhyme to it: fish, dish, butter, gutter—but I can't write verse."

After thinking for a while he added:
"Makers of children's alphabets think like that . . ."

Again we sat in a tavern treating ourselves to a fish *solianka*; Leonid was saying that the "decadents" had invited him to contribute to their review *Vyessy*.

"I shan't accept, I don't like them. With them I feel there is no body behind their words. They "intoxicate" themselves with words, as Balmont is fond of saying. He too is talented and—sick."

On another occasion, I remember, he

said of the *Scorpion* group:

“They outrage Schopenhauer, and I love him, and therefore hate them.”

But on his lips, this was too strong a word—to hate was beyond him, he was too gentle for that. Once he showed me in his diary “words of hatred,” but they turned out to be merely humorous, and he himself laughed heartily at them.

I saw him to his hotel in a cab, and put him to bed. But when I called in the afternoon, I learned that immediately after I left, he got up, dressed, and disappeared. I searched for him the whole day, but could not find him.

He drank continuously for four days, and then went away to Moscow.

§

He had an unpleasant way of testing the sincerity of people's mutual relations. He did it like this: suddenly he would ask, as if by the way, "Do you know what Z. said about you?" Or he would let you know, "S. says of you . . .". And with a dark glance he would look into your eyes as if to test you.

Once I said to him: "Look here, if you go on like that you will end by setting all your friends against one another!"

"What of it?" he replied, "if they quarrel for trifles like that, it only shows that their relations were not sincere."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Stability, a sort of monumental firmness, beauty of relationship. Each one of us ought to realise how delicate is the lace of the soul, how tenderly and warily

it should be regarded. A certain romanticism is needed in the relations between friends; it used to exist in Pushkin's circle, and I envy them it. Women are sensitive only to eroticism. The woman's gospel is the 'Decameron.' "

But in half an hour's time he scoffed at his view of women, as he gave a droll description of a conversation between an erotomaniac and a public school girl.

He could not stand Artsybashev and at times scoffed at him with crude hostility just for his one-sided presentations of woman as exclusively sensual.

§

Once he told me this story. When he was about eleven he saw, somewhere in a wood or park, the deacon kissing a young girl.

“They kissed one another, and both cried,” he said, lowering his voice and shrinking. Whenever he told anything intimate, his limp muscles became strained and keyed up.

“The young girl, you see, was so slim and fragile, little legs like matches; the deacon—fat, the cassock on his belly greasy and shiny. I already knew why people kissed, but it was the first time I saw them crying when they kissed, and I thought it funny. The deacon’s beard got caught on the girl’s open blouse. He began wriggling his head. I whistled in order to frighten them—but got frightened myself and ran away. On the evening of that very same day I felt myself in love with the daughter of our magistrate, a girl of ten. I touched her: she had no breasts. So there was nothing to kiss, and she was not fit for love. Then I fell in love with a neighbour’s maid, a short-

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who in conversation was such a master of humour neglected or was afraid to enrich his stories with its play. Evidently he was afraid of spoiling the dark tones of his pictures with the varied colours of humour.

When I said it was a pity that he had forgotten how well he succeeded in creating out of the short-legged maid the first beauty in the world, that he no longer wished to extract the golden veins of beauty from the dirty mine of reality, he screwed up his eyes, comically and slyly, saying:

"See what a sweet tooth you have got! No, I am not going to pamper you, you romantics. . . ."

It was impossible to persuade him it was just he who was the romantic.

§

In his *Collected Works*, which he presented to me in 1915, Leonid wrote:

“Beginning with *Bergamot* in the *Courier*, all that is contained here has been written, has passed before your eyes, Alexey: it is to a large extent the history of our relations.”

This, unfortunately, is true; unfortunately, because I think it would have been better for Andreyev had he not introduced “the history of our relations” into his stories. But he did it too readily, and in his haste to “refute” my views he thereby spoiled his whole. It seemed it was just in my personality that he had embodied his invisible enemy.

“I have written a story which you are sure not to like,” he once said to me. “Shall we read it?”

We read it. I liked the story very much, save for a few details.

"That's a trifle, that I'll correct," he said with animation, pacing the room, shuffling with his slippers. Then he sat down by my side and throwing back his hair he glanced into my eyes.

"Well, I know, I feel that you were sincere in praising that story. But I can't understand how it can please you?"

"There are many things on earth which don't please me; yet, so far as I can see, they are none the worse for it."

"Reasoning like that you can't be a revolutionary."

"Now, do you look upon a revolutionary as Netchayev did, who held that a revolutionary is not a man?"

He embraced me, laughed:

"You don't properly understand yourself. But, look here, when I wrote *Thought* I had you in my mind. Alexey

Savelov is you. There is one phrase there: 'Alexey was not talented'—this perhaps was wrong on my part, but with your stubbornness you so irritate me at times that you seem to me without talent. It was wrong of me to have written it, wasn't it?"

He was agitated, he even blushed.

I calmed him, saying that I did not consider myself an Arab steed, but only a dray horse. I knew that I owed my success not so much to my inborn talent as to my capacity for work, my love of work.

"You are a strange man," he said softly, interrupting my words and suddenly, changing the tone of the conversation, he began musingly to speak of himself, of the agitations of his soul. He lacked the unpleasant general Russian habit of confessing and of doing penance. But at times he managed to speak of him-

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self with manly frankness, even severity, yet without losing his self-respect. And this was pleasant in him.

"You understand," he said, "every time I write something that particularly agitates me I feel as though a crust had fallen from my soul; I see myself more clearly and I see that I am more talented than the thing written. Take *Thought*. I expected it would astonish you, and now I myself see that it is, essentially, a story with a purpose which, even so, misses the mark."

He jumped to his feet, and shaking back his hair, half jokingly declared:

"I'm afraid of you, you rascal! You are stronger than I. I don't want to submit to you."

And again gravely:

"Something is lacking in me, my dear fellow. Something very important—eh? What do you think?"

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I thought that he treated his talent with unpardonable carelessness and that he lacked knowledge.

"One must study, read, go to Europe. . . ."

He waved his hand:

"It isn't that. One must find a God for oneself and learn to believe in his wisdom."

As usual we began arguing. After one such argument he sent me the proofs of his story, *The Wall*, and with reference to his *Ghosts* he said to me:

"The lunatic who knocks is myself, and the energetic Yegor is you. You really possess confidence in your powers; that is your obsession and the obsession of all your fellow romantics, idealisers of reason, uprooted from life by their dream."

§

The outcry aroused by his story *The Abyss* unnerved him. People ever ready to cater for the gutter press began writing all sorts of unpleasant things about Andreyev, going so far in their calumnies as to approach absurdity. Thus a certain poet announced in a Kharkov paper that Andreyev and his fiancée bathed with no costumes on.

Leonid plaintively asked:

"What does he think then, that one must bathe in a frock-coat? And he lies, too. I did not bathe either with a fiancée or *solo*. I have not bathed for a whole year—there was no river to bathe in. Look here, I have made up my mind to print and have posted on the hoardings a humble request to readers—a brief one:

"Yours is bliss

Who don't read *Abyss*!"

He was excessively, almost morbidly, attentive to his press notices, and always, with sadness or with irritation, complained of the barbarous coarseness of the critics and reviewers; once he even wrote to the press to complain of the hostile attitude adopted towards him personally.

"You should not do this," he was advised.

"Yes, I must. Otherwise these people, in their zeal to reform me, will cut off my ears or to scald me with boiling water. . . ."

§

He suffered cruelly from hereditary alcoholism; his malady would manifest itself at comparatively rare intervals, but nearly always in a very aggravated form. He fought against it, the struggle cost him enormous efforts, but, at times,

falling into despair, he scoffed at his efforts.

“I’ll write a story about a man who, from his youth onwards, was for twenty-five years afraid to drink a thimbleful of vodka. Because of this he lost a multitude of splendid hours in life, he spoilt his career, and died in his prime through having cut his corn unsuccessfully or run a splinter into his finger.”

And indeed, when he came to see me at Nijni, he brought with him the MS. of that very story.

§

In Nijni Leonid met at my house Father Feodor Vladimirsky, the arch-priest of the town of Arzamas, who subsequently became a member of the Second State Duma—a remarkable man. Some

time I will try and write about him fully, and meanwhile I find it necessary briefly to outline the chief deed of his life.

The town of Arzamas, almost from the time of Ivan the Terrible, obtained its water from ponds, where, in the summer, swam corpses of drowned cats, rats, fowls, dogs, while in the winter, under the ice, the water became tainted, and had a disgusting smell. Father Feodor having made it his object to supply the town with wholesome water, spent twelve years in investigating personally the hidden waters around Arzamas. Every summer, year in and year out, he rose at dawn and wandered like a sorcerer about the fields and woods, observing where the ground "perspired." And after long labour he found hidden sub-soil springs, traced their course, canalised them, conducted them to a forest hollow a couple of miles from the town; and having obtained for

a population of ten thousand over a hundred thousand gallons of superb spring water, proposed to the town the laying down of a water supply.

The town had a sum of money bequeathed to it by a merchant to be used either for the laying down of a water supply or for the founding of a credit bank. The tradespeople and the authorities, who employed horses to carry the water in barrels from remote springs outside the town, had no need of a water supply, and using all means to hinder the work of Father Feodor, tried to get hold of the capital for the establishment of a credit bank; while the unimportant inhabitants swallowed the tainted water of the ponds, indifferent and passive, in conformity with their immemorial custom. Thus, having found water Father Feodor was compelled to carry on a long and tedious struggle with the stubborn

selfishness of the rich and the villainous stupidity of the poor.

When I arrived at Arzamas under police surveillance* I found him at the end of his work of gathering together the springs. Exhausted as he was by drudgery and misfortune, that man was the first Arzamasian who dared to make my acquaintance. The wise Arzamasian authorities had most strictly forbidden the employees of the Zemstvo and all other civil servants to visit me, and, in order to intimidate them, had established a police post just under my windows.

Father Feodor came to me one evening, in pouring rain, soaking wet from head to foot, soiled with clay, in heavy peasant boots, in a grey cassock, and in a

* Gorki was forbidden to reside in any of the large towns of Russia, and as punishment for his political views was exiled by the authorities to the remote provincial town of Arzamas.

faded hat—it was so wet that it looked like a lump of soaked clay. Pressing my hand tightly with his horny, digger's hand he said in a stern little bass voice:

“Are you the unrepentant sinner who has been foisted on us for the good of your soul? We will do your soul good! Can you treat me to tea?”

In his grey little beard the dried up little face of an ascetic was hidden. From his deep sockets shone the meek smile of understanding eyes.

“I have come straight from the forest. Have you got any garments into which I could change?”

I had already heard a great deal about him. I knew that his son was a political exile, one daughter was in prison “for politics,” a second daughter was intent on her preparations to get there. I knew that he had already spent all his means on this search for water, had mortgaged

his house, and was now living like a pauper, himself digging ditches in the forest and stopping them with clay. When his strength failed he would implore the neighbouring peasants, for the love of Christ, to lend him a hand. They would help him; but the townspeople, sceptically watching the work of this "queer" parson, would not lift a finger.

It was this man whom Leonid Andreyev met at my house.

It was October, a dry cold day, the wind was blowing, in the streets scraps of paper, birds' feathers and onion peels were flying about. The dust scratched against the window panes, a huge rain cloud moved from the fields to the town. Suddenly, into our room came Father Feodor, rubbing his dust-covered eyes, shaggy, angry, cursing the thief who had stolen his handbag and umbrella, and the Governor General who refused to under-

stand that a water supply is more useful than a credit bank. Leonid opened his eyes wide, and whispered to me:

“What is this?”

An hour later, at the samovar, with his mouth quite agape, he listened to the archpriest of the absurd town of Arzamas denouncing the Gnostics for having fought against the democratic principles of the Church and for trying to make instruction in the knowledge of God inaccessible to the minds of the people.

“These heretics consider themselves seekers after the highest knowledge, aristocrats of the spirit. But are not the people, in the persons of their wisest guides, the embodiment of the wisdom of God and of His spirit?”

‘Docetists,’ ‘Ophites,’ ‘Pleroma,’ ‘Carpocrates,’—Father Feodor droned on, and Leonid, nudging me with his elbow, whispered:

"There is the Arzamasian horror incarnate!"

But soon he was waving his hand in front of Father Feodor's face as he proved to him the impotence of thought; and the priest, shaking his beard, retorted:

"It is not thought that is impotent, but unbelief."

"But that is the essence of thought. . . ."

"You are sophisticated, Mr. Author. . . ."

The rain lashed the window panes, the old man and the young one rummaged among ancient wisdom, and from the wall Leo Tolstoy, with the little stick in his hand—the great pilgrim of this world—gazed down on them. Having overthrown everything we could in the time, we went to our rooms long after midnight. I was already in bed, with a book, when there came a knock at my

door and Leonid appeared, dishevelled, agitated, his shirt collar undone, he sat down on my bed and began rapturously:

“What a parson! How he found me out, eh?”

And suddenly tears gleamed in his eyes.

“Lucky fellow you, Alexey, the devil take you. You always have wonderfully interesting people round you, and I—am lonely . . . or I have hanging on to me. . . .”

He waved his hand. I began telling him of the life of Father Feodor, how he had been seeking for water; of the book he had written, “The History of the Old Testament,” the MS. of which had been taken away from him by order of the Synod; of his book “Love the Law of Life,” also forbidden by the Ecclesiastical censorship. In that book Father Feodor proved by quotations from Pushkin and

from other poets that the feeling of love, as between one man and another, was the basis of life and of the progress of the world, that it was as powerful as the law of universal gravitation, and resembled it in every respect.

"Yes," said Leonid musingly, "there are things I must learn; otherwise I feel ashamed before the parson. . . .

Another knock at the door. Enter Father Feodor, folding his cassock round him, barefooted, sad.

"You are not asleep? So, well . . . Here I am! I heard talking, I thought I'd come and apologise! I rather shouted, young people, but don't take offence. . . . I lay down, thought of you. You are nice people. I decided that I had grown warm for no reason. . . . Now, here I am, forgive me! I'm going to bed . . ."

Both sat down on the bed, and again

began an endless conversation. Leonid, elated, laughed again and again.

“What a country this Russia of ours is! ‘Look here, we haven’t yet solved the problem of the existence of God, and you are calling us to dinner!’ It is not Byelinsky who says this, it is what all Russia says to Europe. For Europe, in the main, calls us to dine, to feed well, nothing but this!”

And Father Feodor, wrapping his thin, bony legs in his cassock, smilingly replied:

“After all Europe is our godmother, don’t forget it! Without her Voltaires, without her men of science, we should not now be disputing about matters philosophical, but should be silently swallowing *bleeny* [pancakes] — and only that!”

At daybreak Father Feodor left us, and in a couple of hours he was gone—to set

about work again on the Arzamasian water supply. And Leonid having slept till evening, said to me then:

“Just think, in whose interest and for what purpose is it that in this rotten little town a parson should live who is energetic, interesting and a wizard? And why indeed should the parson of this town be a wizard, eh? What nonsense? You know one can live only in Moscow. Come, leave this place. It is horrid here—rain, dirt . . .”

And immediately he began preparing to go home.

At the railway station he said:

“And yet this parson is an oddity. It is all a story!”

He complained more than once that he scarcely met any big, original people:

“Now, you can find them; while only burrs that I drag along on my tail stick to me. Why is it?”

I mentioned people whose acquaintance would be useful to him—men of high culture or of original mind. I spoke to him of V. V. Rosanov and others. It seemed to me that an acquaintance with Rosanov would be extremely useful to Andreyev. He was surprised!

“I can’t make you out!”

And he spoke of Rosanov’s conservatism, which he need not have done, since his essential self was profoundly indifferent to politics, only now and then displaying fits of external curiosity about them. His real attitude to political activities he expressed most sincerely in his story *As it was—So it will be*.

I tried to prove to him that one can learn from the devil himself or a thief as well as from a saintly recluse, and that study does not mean submission.

“That is not quite true,” he replied, “all learning represents submission to

facts. And Rosanov I don't like. He reminds me of the dog in the Bible who returns to his vomit."

At times it seemed as if he avoided personal acquaintance with big people, because he was afraid of their influence on him. He would meet such a person once or twice. Sometimes he would praise him ardently; but his interest was short lived.

So it was with Savva Morosov. After the first long conversation with him, Andreyev, carried away by the man's subtle mind, wide knowledge and energy, called him Yermak Timofeyevitch [the conqueror of Siberia], and said that he would play a great political rôle:

"He has the face of a Tartar; but, my dear fellow, he is an English lord!"

And Savva Morosov said of Andreyev:

"He only appears self-assured; but he does not feel confidence in himself and

seeks to obtain it from his mind. But his mind wavers. He knows that and does not trust it . . .”

§

I write as my memory prompts me, with no care for sequence or for chronology.

In the Moscow Art Theatre, when it was still in Karetny Row, Leonid introduced me to his fiancée, a slim, fragile girl with lovely clear eyes. Modest, reserved, she appeared to me unoriginal; but I soon became convinced that she was a person of an understanding heart.

She realised splendidly the need of a maternal, watchful attitude to Andreyev, at once and deeply she comprehended the significance of his talent and the tormenting fluctuations of his mood. She

was one of those rare women who, capable of being passionate mistresses, are yet able to love with the love of a mother. This double love armed her with a subtle knowledge, so that she had a marvellous understanding of the genuine complainings of his soul as well as of the high-sounding words of a capricious passing mood.

As is known, a Russian 'For a word that is witty shows his father and mother no pity,' Leonid, too, was very much carried away by words that were 'witty,' and at times composed maxims in very dubious taste.

"A year after marriage a wife is like a well-worn boot: one does not feel it," he said once in the presence of Alexandra Mikhailovna (his wife). She was capable of taking no notice of such phrase-making, and at times even found these pranks of the tongue witty, and laughed

caressingly. But, possessing in a high degree sense of self-respect, she could—if need be—show herself very obstinate, even immovable. There was subtly developed in her a taste for the music of words, for forms of speech. She was small, lithe, elegant and at times somewhat amusingly, childishly grave—I nicknamed her “Lady Shura”^{*}—the name stuck to her.

Leonid valued her, and she lived in constant concern for him, in a continuous tension of all her powers, her personality was completely sacrificed to her husband’s interests.

At the Andreyevs’ house in Moscow authors often met together, it was very crowded and cosy. ‘Lady Shura’s’ lovely eyes, smiling caressingly, restrained to a certain extent the ‘breadth’

^{*} ‘Shura’ is the diminutive pet form of ‘Alexandra.’

of Russian natures. Chaliapin often put in an appearance, fascinating everyone with his stories.

When "Modernism" was in full flower an attempt was made at the Andreyev gatherings to understand it. But on the whole it was condemned, which was much the simplest way. There was no time to think seriously of literature; war and politics were of first importance. Blok, Byely, Bryussov, appeared 'isolated provincials'; in the most favourable opinion—queer fellows, in the least favourable—something like traitors to "the great traditions of the Russian commonwealth." I also thought and felt like that. Was it the time for a "Symphony" when the whole of Russia was gloomily making ready to dance the *trepak*? Events were moving towards a catastrophe, the symptoms of its approach were becoming ever more and

more ominous. The Social Revolutionaries were throwing bombs, and each explosion shook the whole country, calling forth an intense expectation of a fundamental overthrow of social life. It was in Andreyev's flat that the sittings of the Central Committee of the Social Democrats—the Bolsheviks—took place; and once the whole committee, together with the host, was arrested and carried off to prison.

Having spent a month in prison Andreyev came out as though from the pool of Siloam—hearty and cheerful.

“It does one good to be tied down,” he said, “it makes you want to fly out in all directions!”

And he laughed at me.

“Well, now, pessimist. Is not Russia coming to life? And you rhymed: ‘autocracy—gone rusty.’”

He published then his stories *The*

Marscillaise, The Alarm, The Story which will never be finished. But already in October, 1905, he read to me the MS. of his story *As it was*.

"Is it not premature?" I asked.

"The good is always premature . . ." he answered.

Soon he went off to Finland and was right in doing so: the senseless brutality of the December events would have crushed him. In Finland he was active politically; he spoke at meetings, published in Helsingfors papers bitter attacks on the policy of the Monarchists. But his mood was depressed, his view on the future hopeless. In Petersburg I received a letter from him. Among other things he wrote:

"Each horse has its inborn peculiarities, nations too. There are horses for which all roads lead to the public house: our country is now turned towards a goal

most beloved by it and for a long time it will go on in a drunken frenzy."

§

A few months later we met in Switzerland, at Montreux. Leonid jeered at the life of the Swiss:

"We people of large plains can't live in these cockroach holes," he would say.

It appeared to me he had become somewhat faded, dimmed; a glassy expression of fatigue and of disquieting sadness showed in his eyes. Of Switzerland he spoke as flatly, as superficially, and in the same words as the freedom-loving inhabitants of Tchukhloma, Konotop and Tetiushi have been wont to speak for ever so long. One of these defined the Russian notion of freedom profoundly and pointedly in these words:

"In our town we live as in a public bath, without restrictions, without ceremony."

About Russia Leonid spoke reluctantly and tediously, and once sitting by the fireplace he recalled a few lines of Yakoubovitch's melancholy poem "To My Country."

"Why should we love thee,
Art thou our mother?"

"I have written a play. Shall we read it?"

And in the evening he read *Savva*.

While he was still in Russia, hearing about young Ufimtsev and his comrades who attempted to blow up the icon of the Virgin of Kursk, Andreyev decided to work this episode into a story, and at that very time he at once created the plan of the story and definitely outlined the characters. He was particularly fascinated by Ufimtsev, a poet in the domain of scienti-

fic technique, a youth who possessed the undoubted talent of an inventor. Exiled to the Semiretchensk province, I believe, to Karkaraly, living there under the strict surveillance of men ignorant and superstitious, who denied him the necessary tools and materials, he invented an original motor of internal combustion, perfected the cyclostyle, worked on a new system of dredging, invented a "permanent cartridge" for sporting guns. I showed the designs of his motor to engineers at Moscow, and they told me that Ufimtsev's invention was very practical, ingenious and clever. I don't know the fate of all these inventions—having settled abroad I lost sight of Ufimtsev.

But I knew that young man was one of those superb dreamers who, carried away by their belief and love, march in different ways to one and the same goal—the arousing in their people of that sensible

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energy that creates goodness and beauty.

I was sad and vexed to see that Andreyev had distorted such a character, as yet untouched in Russian literature. It seemed to me that in the story, in the way it had been conceived, that character should have found the appreciation and the tone worthy of it. We had a little argument, and perhaps I spoke rather sharply of the necessity of representing exactly certain—most rare and positive—phenomena of actuality.

Like all people of a definitely circumscribed "ego," with a keen perception of their "selfness," Leonid did not like being contradicted. He took offence, and we parted coldly.

§

I believe it was in 1907 or 1908 that Andreyev arrived at Capri, after burying

"Lady Shura" in Berlin—she died of puerperal fever. The death of this sensible and good friend reacted very painfully on Leonid's soul. All his thoughts and words centred in recollections of the senselessness of it.

"You understand," he said with strangely dilated pupils, "she was still alive as she lay in bed, but already her breath smelt of a corpse. It was a very ironical smell."

Dressed in a black velvet jacket he even outwardly looked crushed, down-trodden. His thoughts and words were weirdly concentrated on the problem of death. It so happened that he settled down in the villa Caraciollo, which belonged to the widow of an artist, a descendant of the marquis Caraciollo, that supporter of the French party who had been executed by Ferdinand Bomba. In the dark rooms of that villa it was

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damp and gloomy: on the walls hung unframed grimy pictures that looked like mould-stains. In one of the rooms was a large smoke-stained fireplace, and in front of the windows, shading them, grew a dense cluster of shrubs. From the walls of the house ivy crept in at the window-panes. This room Leonid turned into his dining-room.

One evening when I arrived I found him in a chair, in front of the fireplace. Dressed in black and bathed in the purple glow of the smouldering coal, he held on his knees his little son Vadim, and in a low tone, with sobs, was telling him something. I entered softly, it seemed to me that the boy was falling asleep. I sat down on a chair by the door and I heard Leonid telling his son how Death stalked over the earth and mowed down little children.

"I'm frightened," Vadim said.

“Don’t you want to hear?”

“I’m frightened,” the boy repeated.

“Well, go to bed. . . .”

But the child pressed close to his father’s knees and began crying. For long we could not manage to comfort him. Leonid was in a hysterical mood, his words irritated the boy who stamped his feet and cried:

“I don’t want to sleep! I don’t want to die!”

When his granny took him away, I observed that it was hardly necessary to frighten the boy with stories like that, stories about death, the invincible giant.

“But if I can’t speak of anything else?” he said sharply. “At last I understand how indifferent ‘beautiful Nature’ is, and I want one thing only—to tear my portrait out of this frivolously pretty frame.”

It was difficult, almost impossible, to

speak to him. He was nervous, irritable, and it seemed as though he deliberately chafed his wound.

“The idea of suicide haunts me; it seems to me that my shadow crawls after me, whispering ‘Begone, die!’”

This aroused considerable anxiety among his friends; but now and then he would drop hints that he was consciously and deliberately creating this anxiety. It was as though he wished to hear once more what they had to say in justification and defence of life.

But the cheerful scenery of the island, the caressing beauty of the sea, and the genial attitude of the Caprians to the Russians soon drove away Leonid’s gloomy mood. In a couple of months he was seized, as by a whirlwind, with a passionate desire for work.

I remember one moonlit night, sitting on the pebbles by the sea, he said, with a

shake of his head:

"*Basta!* To-morrow morning I'll begin to work!"

"The best thing you could do."

"Just so!"

And—a thing which he had not done for a long time—he began to talk cheerfully of his plans for new books.

"First of all, old fellow, I will write a story with the despotism of friendship for its subject. I'll pay off my score to you, you rascal!"

And instantly he began—easily and quickly—to weave a humorous story of two friends, one a dreamer, the other a mathematician. The one spends his whole life in the clouds, while the other is carefully calculating the expense of these imaginary travels, thereby decidedly killing once and for all the dreams of his friend.

But immediately afterwards he said:

"I want to write about Judas. When I was in Russia I read a poem about him, I don't remember by whom*—it was very clever. . . . What do you think of Judas?"

At that time I had a translation of Julius Wexel's tetralogy *Judas and Christ*, and a translation of Thor Goedberg's story, also Golovanov's poem. I suggested that he should read them.

"I don't want to, I have an idea of my own, and they might muddle me. You had better tell me what they say. No, you had better not, don't tell me."

As was his way—in moments of creative excitement—he jumped to his feet—he had to move about.

"Let's be off!"

On the way he gave me an account of his *Judas*, and in three days brought me the manuscript. With that story began

* By A. Roslavliev

one of the most productive periods of his creative activity. At Capri he thought out his play *Black Masks*, wrote the caustic satire *Love of One's Neighbour*, the story *Darkness*, created the plan of *Sashka Zheguliov*, sketched out his play *Ocean*, and wrote several chapters—two or three—of his long tale *My Memoirs*—all these in the course of six months. These serious works and plans did not prevent Leonid from taking a lively part in composing the play *Alas*, a piece in the classical “people’s theatre” style, written partly in verse, partly in prose, with songs, dances, and all kinds of tortures perpetrated on the unfortunate Russian peasants. The plot of the play is clearly enough indicated by the list of dramatis personæ:

Oppressum—a merciless landlord.

Furiosa—his wife.

Philisterius—brother to Oppressum, a

prose litterateur.

Decadentius — unsuccessful son to

Oppressum.

Endurance—a peasant, very unhappy,
but not always drunk.

Griefella—Endurance's beloved wife,
full of meekness and common sense,
although pregnant.

Sufferalla — Endurance's beautiful
daughter.

Smackface—a most horrible police-
constable (Bathes in full uniform
and all his medals).

Mangle—an indubitable village police-
man, but, in fact, the noble Count
Edmond de Ptié.

Motrya Bell—secretly married to the
Count, the Spanish Marchioness
Donna Carmen Intolerabilia Detest-
abilia, in fact, disguised as a gitana.
The Shadow of the Russian literary
critic Skabitchevsky.

The Shadow of Koblitz-Yusov.

Athanasius Schapov, in a perfectly sober state.

“We told you so”—a group of persons without words or actions.

The play takes place in “Sky-blue Clay,” Oppressum’s estate, twice mortgaged to the Noblemen’s Bank and once mortgaged somewhere else.

A whole act of this play had been worked out fully saturated with delightful absurdities. Leonid wrote the prose dialogue, which was terribly funny, so droll indeed that he himself laughed like a child at his own inventions.

Never before or since have I seen him in a frame of mind so active, so unusually industrious. He renounced, as it were, for ever, his dislike for the process of writing, and he could sit at his table all day and all night, half-dressed, unkempt,

cheerful. His imagination blazed wonderfully brightly and productively — nearly every day he told me the plan of a new tale or story.

"Now at last I have taken myself in hand," he would say triumphantly.

And he inquired about the famous pirate Barbarossa, about Tommaso Aniello, about smugglers, carbonari, about the life of Calabrian shepherds.

"What a multitude of subjects, what a diversity of life!" He was in raptures.

"Yes, these people have accumulated something for posterity. But with us: I picked up *The Lives of the Russian Tzars*, and read that they ate. I tried to read *The History of the Russian People* — they suffered. I gave it up. The whole thing hurts and bores."

But, while the plans he related were full of colour and substance, he composed carelessly. In the first version of his

Judas several mistakes occurred which indicated that he had not even taken the trouble to read the New Testament. When he was told that "Duke Spadaro" sounds as absurd to an Italian as "Prince Bashmatchnikov" would to a Russian, and that St. Bernard dogs did not exist in the twelfth century he was annoyed.

"These are trifles!" he objected.

"One can't say: 'They drink wine like camels,' without adding 'drink water.'"

"Rubbish!" he said.

He behaved to his talent as an indifferent rider treats a superb horse—he galloped it mercilessly, but did not love it, did not tend it. His hand had not the time to draw the intricate designs of his riotous imagination; he did not trouble to develop the power and dexterity of his hand. At moments he himself realised that this was a great hindrance to the normal growth of his talent.

“My language is ossifying. I feel it is getting more difficult for me to find the necessary words. . . .”

He tried to hypnotise the reader by the monotony of his phrasing, but his phrasing was losing the convincing quality of beauty. Wrapping his thought in the cotton-wool of monotonously obscure words he only succeeded in revealing it too much, and his stories read like popular dialogues on philosophical subjects.

Now and then, aware of this, he was vexed:

“It is all cobweb, it sticks, but is not solid! Yes, I must read Flaubert. I believe you are right. Indeed he is a descendant of those mason geniuses who built the indestructible temples of the Middle Ages.”

§

At Capri Leonid was told an episode of which he made use for his story *Darkness*. The hero of that episode was an old acquaintance of mine, a Revolutionary. In reality, the affair was very simple: a girl at a brothel, having guessed intuitively that her visitor was a revolutionary, hunted by detectives and driven to take shelter there from the pursuit of the political police, treated him with a mother's tender care and with the tact of a woman who still possesses the sense of respect for a hero. But the hero, a bookish man of clumsy soul, responded to the impulse of the woman's heart with a sermon on morality, so reminding her of what she wanted to forget at the moment. Hurt by this she smacked his face—a smack perfectly deserved, in my

opinion. Then, having realised the whole crudity of his mistake, he apologised to her and kissed her hand—I think he might have omitted the kissing. That is all.

Sometimes, unfortunately very seldom, reality happens to be more truthful and more pleasant than even a very talented story that is based on it.

So it was in this case. But Leonid distorted the meaning as well as the form of the event out of recognition. In the actual brothel there was neither the agonising and foul mockery at man, nor even one of those weird details with which Andreyev has enriched the story so abundantly.

This distortion affected me very painfully: Leonid, as it were, revoked and annulled the feast which I had been awaiting long and hungrily. I know people too well not to appreciate—very

highly—the least manifestation of a good, honest feeling. Certainly I could not help pointing out to Andreyev the meaning of his action, which to me was equivalent to murder for a mere whim, for a wicked whim. He reminded me of the freedom of the artist, but this did not change my attitude—even now I am not convinced that such rare manifestations of ideally human feelings should be arbitrarily distorted by the artist, for the gratification of a dogma he loves.

We talked long on this theme. But although our conversation bore a perfectly peaceful friendly character, still from that moment something snapped between me and him.

The end of that conversation is very memorable to me:

“What are you trying for?” I asked Leonid.

“I don’t know,” he said, shrugging his

shoulder and closing his eyes.

"But you certainly have some desire—either it is always there before all others, or it arises more often than all others?"

"I don't know," he repeated. "I believe there is nothing of the sort. Sometimes, though, I feel that I need fame—much fame, as much as the whole world could give. Then I concentrate it in myself, condense it to its ultimate capacity, and when it has acquired the force of explosive matter, I explode, illuminating the world with a new light. And after that people will begin to live with a new mind. You see, what we need is a new mind, not this lying old swindler! He takes from me all the best of my flesh, all my feelings and, promising to return them with interest, returns nothing, saying: 'To-morrow!' 'Evolution.' Then when my patience is exhausted and the thirst for life stifles me—'Revolution!' he

says. And fondly goes on deceiving till I die, having received nothing."

"You must have belief, not reason."

"Perhaps. But if so, then first of all belief in myself."

He paced the room in agitation, then sitting down on the table, waving his hand in front of my face, he went on:

"I know that God and the Devil are mere symbols. But it seems to me that the whole life of man, all the meaning of it, consists in the infinite and boundless expansion of these symbols, fed with the flesh and blood of the world. And having invested these two opposites with all its powers—to the very last—mankind will disappear, but those two will become carnal realities and will go on living in the emptiness of the universe, face to face with one another, invincible, immortal. There is no sense in this. But there is none anywhere, in anything."

He grew pale, his lips trembled, stark terror shone in his eyes. Then he added in a low voice, feebly:

“Let us imagine the Devil as woman, God as man, and let them beget a new being, certainly just as dual as you and I. Just as dual. . . .”

§

He left Capri unexpectedly, all of a sudden. Only the day before his departure he had said to me that he would sit down at his table and work for three months. But on the evening of the very same day he said to me:

“You know, I have decided to leave this place. After all, one must live in Russia. Here one is overcome by a kind of operatic levity—one wants to write vaudevilles—vaudevilles with songs. Life

simply is not real here, it is an opera: there is more singing here than thinking. Romeo, Othello and the rest of their kind—Shakespeare made them—the Italians are incapable of tragedy. Here neither Byron nor Poe could have been born.”

“And what about Leopardi?”

“Well, Leopardi, who knows about him? He is one of those who are talked about, but not read.”

As he left he said to me:

“This, Alexeyushko, is also an Arzamas—a gay little Arzamas, no more than that.”

“Don’t you remember how it fascinated you?”

“Before marriage we are all fascinated. . . . You will be leaving here soon? Do go away, it is time you went. You are beginning to look like a monk. . . .”

§

At the time I was living in Italy my mind was very uneasy on account of Russia. As early as 1911 people round me spoke confidently of the inevitability of an all-European war and of the certainty that that war would be fatal to Russians. My uneasy mood was particularly heightened by facts which indicated beyond all doubt that in the spiritual world of the great Russian people there lurked something morbidly obscure. Reading the volume on agrarian risings in the Central Russian provinces, published by the Free Economic Society, I saw that those risings bore a particularly brutal and senseless character. An investigation of the crimes of the population of the Moscow Circuit, based on an examination of the reports of the Moscow

High Court, astounded me by its revelation of the tendency of the criminal will, expressed in the great number of cases in crimes against the person, violation of women, and rape of minors. Even before then I had been unpleasantly struck by the fact that, though in the Second State Duma there had been a very considerable number of priests, men of the purest Russian blood, these men had not produced a single talent, a single statesman. And there was a great deal more that confirmed my anxiously sceptical attitude towards the fate of the Great-Russian race.

On my arrival in Finland I met Andreyev, and talking to him, told him my cheerless thoughts. Hotly and even as though wounded by them, he argued with me. But his arguments seemed to me unconvincing: he had no facts.

But suddenly, lowering his voice, with

his eyes screwed up, as though straining to look into the future, he began to talk of the Russian people in words unusual with him—abruptly, incoherently, and with great and undoubtedly sincere conviction.

I am unable, and if I could I should not like, to reproduce his words. Their force consisted not in their logic nor in their beauty, but in a feeling of tormented sympathy for the people, a feeling of which, in such force and in such expression, I had not thought Leonid capable.

He shook all over with nervous tension, and crying, almost sobbing like a woman, he shouted:

"You call Russian literature provincial because the majority of the great Russian writers are men of the Moscow province? Good, let us suppose so. But yet it is a world literature, it is the most serious and powerful creative activity of

Europe. The genius of Dostoevsky alone is enough in itself to justify even the senseless, even the thoroughly criminal, life of the millions of the people. And suppose the people are spiritually sick—let us heal them and remember as has been said: ‘A pearl only grows in a diseased shell.’”

“And the beauty of the beast,” I asked.

“And the beauty of human endurance, of meekness and love?” he replied. And he went on to speak of the people, of literature more and more ardently and passionately.

It was the first time he had spoken so passionately, so lyrically. Previously I had heard such strong expressions of his love applied only to talents congenial to his spirit—to Edgar Poe most frequently of all.

Soon after our conversation this filthy war broke out. Our attitude, different

towards it, divided me still further from Andreyev. We scarcely met; it was only in 1916, when he brought me his books that we both once more deeply felt how much we had gone through and what old comrades we were. But, to avoid arguing, we could speak only of the past; the present erected between us a high wall of irreconcilable differences.

I shall not be violating the truth if I say that to me that wall was transparent and permeable—I saw behind it a big, original man, who for ten years had been very near to me, my sole friend in literary circles.

Differences of outlook ought not to affect sympathies, and I never gave theories and opinions a decisive rôle in my relations to people.

Leonid Nicolaievitch Andréyev felt otherwise. But I don't blame him for this; for he was what he wished to be and

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could not help being—a man of rare
originality, rare talent and manly enough
in his seekings after truth.

THE END

